

Filming Compassion

Service learning components have increased markedly in the curriculum of both public and private schools in the past few years. In fact, according to a 1999 report by the National Center for Education Statistics, 64% of all public schools have students participate in service learning (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss/publications/1999043/>).

Here we offer an in-depth look at how video production can be integrated into a school's service learning requirements. Specifically, we show how students in a video production class can hone their skills while producing a video that can be a useful promotion tool for nonprofit agencies.

Video production provides a way for students to learn about nonprofit organizations as they work on the project. Students not involved directly in the project also learn about the organizations from the video produced by their peers. Moreover, parents, administrators, and other school staff members also learn about the organizations by viewing the student-produced videos. Nonprofit agencies that agree to allow students to produce videos about their organizations end up with a wonderful tool they can use to educate the public about their activities, to help raise funds, and to recruit volunteers.

Exploring a Classroom Application

Service work is an integral part of the curriculum at Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy High School in Cincinnati, Ohio. Students must complete 120 hours of service in order to graduate. They can fulfill this requirement through after-school projects, individual involvement outside of school, or through many classes in a variety of

Video Production in Service Learning

subjects in which teachers incorporate a service learning component. I found a way to include service learning in a video production class and worked with my co-author Marilyn Clark to plan it.

I contacted several nonprofit organizations in the Cincinnati area and asked if they would allow students on site to produce a video about their agency. Once it was explained that the video would become the property of the organization to use as they saw fit, organizations responded with an enthusiastic "yes." The agencies could not provide video equipment (e.g., computers, cameras, etc.) and had no staff members or volunteers available to oversee the video production. In turn, I explained to the nonprofits that because these were to be student-produced videos we could not guarantee professional-quality results. The

organizations we partnered with for student videos included:

- An after-school care facility for inner-city children
- An organization that provides high-quality used clothing at a nominal charge for low-income customers
- An inner-city school
- A center that provides hot meals for homeless and low-income clients

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Subject: Community service, technology education

Grades: 9–12 (Ages 14–18)

Technology: Digital video

Standards: NETS•S 1, 3 (<http://www.iste.org/nets/>)



I explained to students that they would encounter a number of difficulties as they worked on their video projects. These organizations had limited resources and could not provide the equipment or staff required for video production. I also emphasized the importance of dealing responsibly while transporting expensive video equipment from school to nonprofit.

I placed students in pairs and gave them the phone numbers of the organization to which they were assigned. Because video production classes at Cincinnati Hills High School typically include 14 students, each class could produce videos for seven separate nonprofits. Students arranged to visit the agency to gather ideas, discuss possibilities, and find out what the needs of the org-



anization were. All visits had to be scheduled during non-school time. I recruited parent volunteers to drive student teams to their assigned agencies.

On site, the directors of the nonprofits gave the students tours, providing background information concerning each agency's mission. Staff members explained who the audience for the video would be and advised students regarding the desired length of the video. Many of the nonprofit

organizations had specific ideas about how they would use the video. For example:

- A church had a steady stream of new volunteers and needed an instructional video to describe programs and the role of volunteers. This would be helpful to program directors who felt they were spending too much time each month training volunteers.
- A homeless center wanted a video to show people who were considering making a donation to their organization how their facility meets the needs of clients.
- A private inner-city school wanted a video to show people who were considering donating funds how students spent a typical day at school.

Rubric to Assess Student Videos

	Exemplary 4 points	Proficient 3 points	Nearly Proficient 2 points	Incomplete 1 point
Script/storyboarding	Storyboard illustrates the video with thumbnail sketches of each scene. Notes about proposed dialogue text are included. There is a logical sequence to the presentations.	Storyboard is complete but leaves out some details. No logical sequence to follow.	Storyboard is difficult to follow.	No storyboard.
Introduction	Compelling introduction. Provides motivating content that hooks the viewer.	Introduction is clear and somewhat interesting but doesn't grab viewer's attention.	Introduction doesn't provide clear sense of what is in the video.	Introduction is missing or, at best, extremely vague.
Video editing	Tape is edited to show high-quality shots, and the video moves smoothly from scene to scene. Various transitions are used.	Tape is edited to show good-quality shots. Some variety of transitions is employed.	Tape is edited but poor shots are left in the video. Transitions are all the same.	Tape is poorly edited, and no transitions are used.
Pace	All video clips fit the storyline. Clips are just long enough to make the point clear.	Most of the video moves along at a steady pace.	Many clips are unedited, so some are too fast and some are too slow.	Clips are not edited and are either too long or too short.
Teamwork	Students worked cooperatively and were respectful and reliable when working with people at the agencies visited.	Overall, students worked well together with just a few minor difficulties and were reliable.	Students did not get along well with one another at times and were not always reliable when working at the agencies.	Students did not work cooperatively most of the time and often were unreliable when working at the agencies.
Overall effectiveness of video	Video was very effective, fast-paced, lively, and very informative.	Video was effective, fast-paced, lively, and informative.	Video was informative but was ineffective in keeping viewer's interest.	Video did not gain viewer's interest, did not convey information, and was ineffective.

When students returned to the classroom, they had to storyboard their ideas before they could shoot their videos. After storyboarding, students made arrangements to film on site. Students were instructed to shoot approximately one hour of footage to ensure at least a few minutes of high-quality videography.

Once the video was partially completed, students returned to the agencies to show staff members the footage they had taken. This gave people at the organizations the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the footage. Again, because most organizations lacked equipment, students usually had to bring VCRs.

Back at school, I asked students to critique one another's videos, an activity that encouraged development of critical and analytical thinking skills. Students also asked other teachers and parents to evaluate the student projects and provide feedback. In general, I encouraged students to edit videos so that the final product would be fast-paced, lively, and informative.

Students added music to the videos using Final Cut 4, which has a program called Soundtrack that allowed students to create their own music. This was a way of avoiding issues of copyright infringement. In addition, a group of students at the school who have their own band and have recorded a CD were thrilled to provide music for one of the videos in order to see their names listed in the credits. Another source of music was FreePlaymusic.com.

While working on their video projects, students learned to use digital camcorders, to import video, edit, and export to videotape or DVD. Students also explored various types of shots including close-ups and long shots. Using Final Cut, students also learned to add text to the videos to introduce different sections and provide credits at the end.

Typically, videos began with a virtual tour of the facility narrated

by a staff member who described the organization's physical layout as well as its humanitarian mission. Volunteers were filmed commenting on why they became involved and how they serve the agency. Following footage showing volunteers performing a variety of tasks, contact information was provided for those who might be inspired by the film and want to become involved. Videos were evaluated on the basis of a grading rubric created expressly for this project.

The nonprofit directors were pleased with the videos. One said, "The video was very professional and just what we needed!" Another commented she was "surprised that high school students could produce such a high-quality video!"

Benefits to Students

In addition to fulfilling some of their service learning requirements and acquiring new skills surrounding video production, students also learned about the day-to-day operation of nonprofit agencies. By the end of the grading period, students felt good not only about successfully completing the class and building their video production skills but also about having contributed a useful promotion tool to a worthy organization.

Problems Encountered

In addition to the lack of equipment available at most nonprofit organizations, students also faced issues involving disguising the identity of clients shown in video footage to preserve their privacy. However, this actually turned out to be an incentive for students to learn how to use Final Cut to blur the faces of clients appearing on tape.

The lack of staff available to supervise student videographers on site at first seemed to be a disadvantage. Ultimately, though, this turned out to be a catalyst to more student-led innovation and initiative in moving the filming process forward.

Possible Changes in Future Classes

We concluded that it would be helpful to build a "waiting list" of organizations willing to participate. This would allow teachers to spend more time working with students in preparation for site visits and less time during the course recruiting agencies with which to partner. Clark also suggested getting an art class involved in designing covers for each video. This would allow students to present the nonprofits with a more professional quality product while at the same time providing other students with a means of earning service learning credit. Finally, she suggested having students prepare questions and conduct "on-air" interviews with staff members and volunteers. This would allow students to learn interviewing skills.

Conclusion

Schools across the nation are increasingly adding a service learning component to their curriculum, especially at the high school level. When students in a video production class partner with nonprofit organizations, the result is a winning outcome for everyone involved. Students develop their skills while learning about the inner workings of a humanitarian agency, and, in turn, the agencies gain a video that can be a valuable tool used in promoting their organization.



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